

VZCZCXYZ0000
OO RUEHWEB

DE RUEHDM #1358 0861655
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
O 271655Z MAR 06
FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 7940
INFO RUEHXX/ARAB ISRAELI COLLECTIVE
RUCNMEM/EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE
RUEHGB/AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD 0717

C O N F I D E N T I A L DAMASCUS 001358

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

PARIS FOR ZEYA, LONDON FOR TSOU

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/26/2016
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [SY](#)
SUBJECT: PROMINENT OPPOSITION AND CIVIL SOCIETY FIGURES
ARRESTED THROUGHOUT SYRIA

REF: DAMASCUS 001219

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Stephen A. Seche for reasons 1.4(b)/(d)
)

11. (C) SUMMARY: SARG authorities have arrested or detained a number of prominent Syrian opposition and civil society figures within the last few days. Prominent activist and former political detainee Ali Abudullah, together with his eldest son Mohammed, were arrested on March 23 by unidentified intelligence agents, a week after another son, Omar, was detained. Aleppo-based Syrian Free National Party founder and Damascus Declaration signatory Samir Nashar was arrested by Syrian Military Intelligence on March 25. Other prominent activists, including human rights activist Nejati Tayara and Damascus Declaration signatory Fida Akram al-Hourani, were also detained last week but were subsequently released. END SUMMARY.

12. (C) FATHER AND SON ACTIVISTS ARRESTED BY UNIDENTIFIED SECURITY AGENTS: SARG authorities arrested journalist Ali Abdullah in the early hours of March 23 at his home. They arrested his son, Mohammed, later in the day. According to human rights activist Rezan Zeituneh, a close friend of the Abdullah family, the arresting security officers refused to identify their security branch affiliation, leaving family members and activists with no information of the father's and son's whereabouts. Abdullah, who was imprisoned for six months by SARG authorities in 2005 after reading a letter from Muslim Brotherhood chief Ali Sadreddin Bayanouni at an April Atassi Forum meeting, has figured prominently in several recent human rights demonstrations. Mohammed has also been active in Syrian civil society and was arrested and convicted of defaming the homeland in September 2005 after launching a support group for political prisoners' families. A second son, Omar, has been detained since March 18, by Syrian Air Force Intelligence (reftel), for his association with a group of student activists.

13. (C) DAMASCUS DECLARATION SIGNATORY ARRESTED: Meanwhile, Aleppo-based Syrian Free National Party founder and Damascus Declaration signatory Samir Nashar was arrested by Syrian Military Intelligence (SMI) agents on March 25. Nashar had recently faced security questioning about his participation in the Syrian National Congress meeting in Washington, DC, and was prevented from traveling abroad in February. He was also recently quoted on the popular website syriacomment.com, in which he called the recent meeting between former Vice President Abdulhalim Khaddam and Bayanouni a "political necessity to build a political framework that is an alternative to the regime."

14. (C) OTHER ACTIVISTS ALSO ARRESTED, DETAINED: Other

prominent activists were also detained and later released by SARG authorities throughout the week. Human rights activist Nejati Tayyara, who was also detained in mid-February, disappeared on March 22 and was released by the General Intelligence Directorate (GID) on March 25. Fida Akram al-Hourani, a Damascus Declaration signatory and daughter of Ba'th party co-founder Akram al-Hourani, was detained for questioning by GID chief Ali Mamluk on March 23 for five hours. Key opposition figure Riad Seif was also interrogated on March 23, during which time he was told not to speak to the press for the next two months (see septel). Bunni noted that other key opposition figures like Damascus Declaration spokesman and opposition politician Hassan Abdulazeem, journalist Michel Kilo, and other dissidents had been interrogated by GID in recent days and had been "pushed hard."

15. (C) ACTIVISTS ATTRIBUTE CRACKDOWN TO BRAMMERTZ REPORT, SHIFTING SARG FOCUS: When asked to explain the reasons for the latest crackdown, activists gave a variety of reasons. Seif told Poloff the regime is nervous about the Brammertz/UNIIIC investigation (septel) and is lashing out at any perceived threats. Bunni also cited regime nerves about the newly announced National Salvation Front the unexpected lack of support from other Arab governments, particularly Egypt, as well as the Brammertz report, which he said may be "laying a trap" for the SARG.
SECHE